



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

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Historic photos guiding management decisions at Hooper Wildlife Area





Prairie plants like mountain mint, rattlesnake master, wild strawberries, milkweeds and more have reappeared at Hooper Wildlife Management Area after sitting dormant for decades under a canopy of cedar trees and black locusts. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources has been mechanically removing the trees and using fire to open these ridgetops to create disturbed habitat once common to the area and preferred by quail and other wildlife. Photo by the Iowa DNR.

Indianola - The Hooper Wildlife Area is a highly popular place to hunt deer and turkeys, but outside of those seasons, it doesn't receive much attention, save for the lake. But that quietness of the offseason could be changing thanks to a series of old photos that are helping to transform the area.

Wildlife management biologist Todd Gosselink began using photos from the 1930s, 50s, 60s and 70s to help identify old farm fields and existing tree lines to locate previously open areas taken over by cedars, honeysuckle and black locust.

The 1950s to 70s is also about the time, as the story goes, when pheasant and quail hunting at Hooper was at its peak. Looking back, the area was mostly open with small farm fields of various grains, fencerows and brushy areas and it's that mixed open habitat that Gosselink aims to return to the area.

"The area filled in with undesirable species because the annual disturbance was gone. We're doing the annual disturbance now through fire, planting food plots and other management techniques," he said. The project began in the fall of 2014.

"We're going to keep doing management and keep doing quail surveys. We know they're here but in really low numbers. I want this to be a success story. Quail like broken and fragmented habitat and that's what we're hoping to provide," he said.

Reclaiming the lobes

Hooper is made up of rugged terrain with lots of valleys. The relatively flatter hilltops have been the focus of his search for remnant prairies.

"It's a long process – 5 to 10 years – we're watching, waiting to see what comes back," he said. "Jury is still out. We're seeing some good things – a species here and there, but we're also aggressive fighting invasive species like sericea lespedeza and reeds canary grass."

One reclaimed former farm field in particular responded like Gosselink had hoped. Prairie plants like mountain mint, rattlesnake master, wild strawberries, milkweeds and more, sitting dormant for decades, have reappeared.

“We want to keep the fire on these lobes to keep expanding the open areas,” he said.
“Keep pushing to get it back to the 50s.”

Birds-eye view today

Hooper has secluded and rugged areas tucked in to its 482 acres five miles south of Indianola. A view from above shows several small sediment collection impoundments that would provide opportunities to catch bullfrogs or harvest wood ducks. The largest is a short hike above the upper end of Hooper Lake.

A vacant osprey platform overlooks this quiet pond that offers kayakers, bird watchers or anglers a new experience away from the crowds. Hikers can explore the network of expanding open areas planted in clover, winter wheat, soybeans, grass and re-emerging prairie.

Hooper Wildlife Management Area has limited facilities, primarily focused on the lower end of the lake. There is a parking lot, boat ramp and courtesy dock.

Partnership with Pheasants Forever

Tackling an improvement project of this size and scale is a little easier when it's supported by partners and the Warren County Chapter of Pheasants Forever has been a strong partner.

Julie Stanley, of Lacona, who recently stepped down after nine years as the Warren County chapter president, said Hooper is an important area for hunting and water activities for families because of its proximity to Indianola.

She said their chapter has helped the Iowa Department of Natural Resources at Hooper by purchasing equipment and hiring contractors to spray for invasive species and plant clover and dove plots. She said it's important to take care of these existing public places.

“Our mission is to make all those areas more accessible to families, be it hunting or fishing,” she said.

With their help, Hooper is on the path back to the good old days.

Bobcat study

Hooper WMA played an important role in the study of Iowa's bobcat population that eventually led to the re-opening of the secretive feline to being trapped.

In 2003, Gosselink was the forest wildlife species research biologist and in the first year of a six year bobcat study. As part of that study, he had trapped a female bobcat and fitted her with a radio collar to study her travel patterns.

After a few years, the battery on the radio collar was reaching its life expectancy so she was re-captured in the spring on the area. Researchers knew she had litter nearby and were hoping to capture a few kittens to examine. They waited to see if any would come to her but no luck.

The female, called 000 for the telemetry frequency, had some biological data collected, was outfitted with a new collar and released.

She never left that general area.

Media Contact: Todd Gosselink, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-238-6936.

Iowa youth trapshooting championships Wednesday in Cedar Falls

Cedar Falls – Iowa's Scholastic Clay Target Program (SCTP) state trapshooting championship event begins June 6 at the Iowa State Trapshooting Association home grounds just north of Cedar Falls.

Middle school and elementary aged athletes will begin the competition on Wednesday with high school athletes competing Thursday through Sunday. More than 630,000 clay

targets will be fired at during the five days of competition by more than 2,600 youth from 117 Iowa teams.

This week's trap championship event is the first culminating event to a season of trap, skeet and sporting clays competitions that started last fall where Iowa teams logged 800 competition events from Sept. 1 through the end of May. Iowa youth have fired at nearly 1.7 million clay targets in these local competitions alone.

Event Details

June 6 – Rookie and Intermediate Divisions (Grades 8 and under)

June 7 – Doubles and Handicap (i.e. added distance) Events, All Ages

June 8 through Sunday June 10 – High School Divisions

Iowa State Trapshooting Association Home Grounds

6138 W Cedar Wapsi Road, Cedar Falls

Event Program, Schedules and Results

Complete event program can be found at

<http://www.iowadnr.gov/Portals/idnr/uploads/Law%20Enforcement/2018eprogram.pdf>

Interactive squad schedules may be viewed by going to <http://shot.sssfonline.com/shot/bin/comp/report/schedule.asp?id=1724> then navigating to the event you would like to see the squad schedule for.

Results leaderboards can be found

at <http://shot.sssfonline.com/shot/bin/comp/report/leaderboard.asp?id=1724>

Scheduled Teams and Athlete Hometown List:

https://sssfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Iowa_State_Trapshoot_AthleteList_2018.xlsx

https://sssfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Iowa_State_Trapshoot_AthleteList_2018.pdf

The event is hosted by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and Iowa State Trapshooting Association.

How the Event Works

On each trapshooting field, athletes line up 16 yards away from a concrete house containing a mechanical clay target thrower. Clay targets flying about 42 mph are launched from the house at random angles when each competitor calls “Pull!”. Competitors fire one shot at each target and targets are scored “dead” (hit) or “lost” (missed). The competitor with the most “dead” targets wins. In SCTP competition there are both individual and team awards presented. Additional events include doubles trap where two targets are presented simultaneously and handicap trap where shooters fire at targets further away from the clay target thrower.

Most teams in Iowa begin practices in March and compete in dual, triangular and invitational meets throughout the spring. Teams are coached by adult volunteers who are certified through the Iowa DNR Basic Shotgun Coach certification program.

Why So Popular?

The Iowa Scholastic Clay Target Program has grown from about 400 athletes in 2007 to nearly 4,000 today. Iowa’s program is the largest of the 42 participating states around country. There is no “bench” in the shooting sports - everyone gets to play regardless of athletic ability. The sport is also co-gender and accommodating to those with disabilities. Many Iowa schools offer varsity letters for trapshooting athletes requiring shooters to follow the same academic standards and good conduct policies as other student-athletes.

Are the Shooting Sports Safe?

According to the American Sports Data, Inc., shooting sports have some of the lowest occurrences of injury compared to other forms of recreation including all popular sports offered in schools today.

All youth athletes involved in SCTP competitions have been provided with extensive coaching in the safe and responsible use of firearms. During all practices and competitions, all firearms must be completely unloaded and carried with the action open unless the athlete is on the firing line and it is their turn to shoot. All activities are closely supervised by trained and responsible adult volunteer coaches.

Shooting sports and firearms safety education replaces curiosity and promotes respect and responsibility in the handling and use of firearms.

Media Contact: Chris VanGorp, Shooting Sports Coordinator, Iowa DNR, 515-313-8048 or Chris.VanGorp@dnr.iowa.gov

Space available in upcoming hunter education classes

Hunter Education Classroom courses are offered by knowledgeable and certified volunteer instructors and Iowa Department of Natural Resources Conservation Officers. Classroom courses are typically 12-15 hours in length and are held over 2 to 3 sessions (days). In order to receive certification, a student must attend all sessions and pass the final exam.

Iowa law requires that anyone born after January 1, 1972 must be certified in hunter education before they are eligible to purchase an Iowa hunting license.

Upcoming Hunter Education Classes

June 11, Elkader, Osborne Nature Center

June 21, Knoxville, Marion County Sportsman Club

July 7, Sioux City, Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center

July 12, Dysart, Union Middle School

July 16, Atlantic, Iowa DNR Environmental Services Field Office

July 16, Homestead, Amana Sportsmans Club

July 24, West Chester, West Chester Heritage Building

Aug. 2, Indianola, Izaak Walton League - Indianola

Aug. 3, Nashua, Nashua Fish and Game Club

Aug. 11, Waterloo, Hawkeye Community College - Waterloo

Aug. 14, Hawarden, Sioux County Conservation Board, Oak Grove Park

Aug. 16, Columbus Junction, American Legion

Aug. 18, Stratford, Izaak Walton League – Boone Valley

Aug. 20, Polk City, Butch Olofson Shooting Range

Aug. 21, Ames, Izaak Walton League – Ames

Aug. 21, Clinton, Izaak Walton League – Clinton

Aug. 23, Rockford, Floyd County Conservation Board, Fossil & Prairie Center

Aug. 25, Aurelia, Aurelia Shelter House

Aug. 25, Vinton, Izaak Walton League – Vinton

Aug. 25, Fairbank, Fairbank Gun Club

Aug. 25, Muscatine, Muscatine County Conservation Board, Environmental Learning Center

Aug. 26, Aurelia, Aurelia Shelter House

Aug. 27, Cherokee, Little Sioux Wildlife Association

Sept. 6, New Hampton, Fredericksburg Sportsmans Club

Sept. 6, Knoxville, Marion County Sportsman Club

Sept. 8, Swisher, America Legion

Sept. 8, Muscatine, Muscatine County Conservation Board, Environmental Learning Center

Sept. 10, Polk City, Butch Olofson Shooting Range

Sept. 11, Marcus, Grace Methodist Church

Sept. 15, Waterloo, Hawkeye Community College – Waterloo

Sept. 19, Exira, Audubon County Conservation Board

Sept. 20, Dubuque, EB Lyons Interpretive Center - Mines of Spain

For more information on these and other hunter education opportunities, go to www.iowadnr.gov/huntered